

BETTY McCOLLUM
4TH DISTRICT, MINNESOTA

2256 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-6631
FAX: (202) 225-1968

661 LASALLE STREET
SUITE 110
SAINT PAUL, MN 55114
(651) 224-9191
FAX: (651) 224-3056
mccollum.house.gov



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August 4, 2020

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos,

I am writing to urge that the Department of Education move with all possible haste to release the slate of FY2020 TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) grants.

As I am sure you are aware, the current SSS awards expire in fewer than 30 days, but the providers and students throughout Minnesota and across the nation have not received any notice about the results of the FY2020 grant competition. This uncertainty about the future of vitally important TRIO programs is only adding to the challenges that our students and higher education campuses are facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have heard from multiple institutions in Minnesota about the hardships being caused by the delayed grant notification, including the inability to conduct recruitment and orientation for new students or to provide the supplies, support, and connection that continuing students need to succeed. Staff have received lay-off notices, and the thousands of students they work with are at risk of losing the relationships and tools they need during an already challenging semester.

As the Congresswoman from Minnesota's Fourth District, I represent dozens of higher education institutions who are fighting to help their students prepare and adjust to the online, hybrid, and other alternative models of learning that the new year will bring. TRIO's programs are a crucial part of that effort, and it is unacceptable to allow students to fall behind because the Department has not met its grant funding deadlines. I am calling on the Department to release the results of the FY2020 SSS grant competition by this Friday, August 7, 2020. If that will not be possible, the Department should immediately provide a complete accounting of why it is not possible to meet that deadline, including where the grants currently are in the review process (i.e., with the Office of Management and Budget or under review by the Secretary) and a timeline for when the Department will release the results.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Betty McCollum".

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress